

# BRANCHING OUT

Creating Connections to End Sexual Violence

Spring 2013

Volume 7, Issue 1

## Happy April!

By Terri DeWalt



I hope everyone has survived this snowy winter in good health. I guess after the mild winter we had last year, it was our turn for some snow. Although I do love some aspects of our Wisconsin winters, I have to say I am happy that warmer weather is right around the corner.

We at Sexual Assault Services have been busy this fall and winter. As a member of the Racine County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) we helped provide a dynamic and well-received two day training in October on Sexual Assault Investigations for Racine County professionals. We had a wonderful panel of local and state professionals and survivors who dedicated themselves to the training. There was a great turnout and we received excellent feedback on its value to the attendees. Thank you again to all of our community partners for helping to make the training a success, and a special thank you to Katy Adler, who served as Training Coordinator.

Another exciting activity for our program was that we have held an Adolescent Survivors group, which began in January and is continuing into April. We've had twelve girls attend the group, all of whom have enjoyed it so much they have asked for the group to be extended three weeks. It is wonderful to see the healing and bonding that can occur when survivors of sexual assault have a safe and inviting place to work on their healing. Thank you to staff member Vicki Biehn and Intern Twyla Gunn for providing that space. Due to the success of this group, we are hoping to provide a group for adult women who were molested as children in the coming months. If you know someone who may be interested in such a group, please refer them to our office at 619-1634.

Some of you may have noticed that we didn't hold our annual Healing Lights Fundraiser this January, which we usually provide in partnership with the Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare Sexual Assault Treatment Center program. That was due to the fact that two of our five employees were out on maternity leave. But don't worry- you will still have the opportunity to enjoy some amazing food and company while supporting a good cause. We are planning on holding our fundraiser this September, with more information coming to you soon.

As we look forward to the coming months, we are excited to be hosting **Racine County's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Take Back the Night (TBTN) on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2013, from 5:00-7:00 p.m.** The event will begin at 5:00 at the Racine Public Library (75 Seventh St. Racine, 53403) and end with food, refreshments and awareness displays at Olympia Brown Unitarian Universalist Church (625 College Ave. Racine, 53403).

If you have attended our Take Back The Night in the past, you know that it is an opportunity to bring awareness to sexual violence within our community and to give

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# Legislative Update

By Vicki Biehn

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV) hosted a legislative advocacy day in Madison on March 27, 2013. This was an opportunity for people to meet with their representatives or one of their staff to share their concerns about issues that are related to sexual assault or domestic violence victims/survivors. Sexual Assault Services of LSS had a group of advocates and survivors at the Legislative Advocacy Day this year. This was a wonderful opportunity to become more involved and to feel empowered!

This year we discussed several issues with our representatives that related to sexual assault survivors. The first issue we addressed with our representatives was increasing the state budget allocation for Sexual Assault Victim Service Providers (SASP's) in the state. The Sexual Assault Victim Services (SAVS) grant program is the sole state allocation of resources to provide sexual assault services in our local communities. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis to local SASPs, counties or tribes that offer a number of important services, including: 24/7 crisis response including hospital accompaniment, systems advocacy, including court accompaniment, prevention activities, and fostering community collaborations and partnerships to enhance services for sexual assault victims. To date, SAVS has been funded with the Crime Victim and Witness Assistance Surcharge—an amount paid by those convicted of certain crimes. Due to a precipitous drop in surcharge revenue over the last couple of years, SAVS grants were reduced by about 30 percent in 2012 from 2011 levels (from roughly \$2 million in 2011 to \$1.4 million in 2012). These cuts, along with significant increases in demand for sexual assault services have resulted in the creation of waiting lists for counseling, fewer prevention activities, and in some cases, the closure of a local service provider. When Governor Scott Walker submitted his budget in February of 2013 he requested \$2 million dollars annually for the SAVS grant, which would restore the funding to the 2011 level, and although more funds are needed to provide sexual assault services to all victims in our state, this is an improvement over the bi-annual budget for SAVS. In Governor Walker's budget he also asked that these funds come from general purpose revenue and not from the Crime Victim and Witness Assistance Surcharge. Our group asked our representatives and senators to approve this budget so that more services will be available to survivors. This is quite a significant improvement in how SAVS has been funded and if this funding is passed, it will create a more consistent and stable funding source for the SAVS grants.

We also asked our representatives to support a bill that would enact victim accompaniment legislation. This bill would allow a survivor to be accompanied by an advocate during various stages of the criminal justice process, including the sexual assault forensic exam, law enforcement interview, and court proceedings, if the victim wishes to

have an advocate present. Currently, victims do not have this right and sometimes the victim is not allowed to have an advocate be there with them to provide support. We believe that providing emotional support and information to the victim during the criminal justice process helps to restore some of the victims' sense of control over their life and helps to keep the victim engaged in the criminal justice process. If the victim stays engaged in the criminal justice process more offenders will be held accountable for their crimes.

We also discussed with our representatives WCASA's desire to establish an annual reporting system of data related to sexual assaults. We believe that public policy decisions should be based on evidence and on data derived from reliable sources that are clearly understood. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of data consistently produced related to sexual assaults in Wisconsin. To more accurately examine the criminal justice system response to sexual assault a wider variety of

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power back to sexual assault survivors and their allies. The event is free and open to all community members. We will have two speakers talk about how sexual violence has impacted their lives and there will be an opportunity for attendees to speak out on an open mic. In addition, we will present the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Sexual Assault Awareness Month Awards to a community professional and a SAS Volunteer Advocate, both of whom contributed to our program in an exceptional way during the past year. The Stars of Courage Project, which consists of hundreds of stars, with each one representing a survivor SAS has worked with over the past fourteen years, will be on display at the Racine Public Library. The Clothesline Project, a collection of t-shirts created by survivors and support people, will be on display at Olympia Brown Unitarian Universalist Church. SAS is grateful to the Racine Public Library and the Olympia Brown Unitarian Universalist Church for their partnership in providing this event.

Beyond these activities, we are always looking for new Volunteer Advocates to assist in our response to the 24-hour Crisis Line and the Racine and Burlington hospitals. If you, or someone you know is interested in learning more about our Advocate program, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Katy Adler at [kadler28@lsswis.org](mailto:kadler28@lsswis.org) or (262) 619-1634.

And last, but certainly not least, if you want to help support our work and are interested in making a donation, please contact us at 262-619-1634 or via email at [tdewalt@lsswis.org](mailto:tdewalt@lsswis.org).

Thank you for all you do to help make our community a safer place.

Be well,

—Terri





## Meet Twyla

Hello! My name is Twyla, the Behavioral Health Intern at Sexual Assault Services (SAS). Currently, I am finishing my master's degree in Professional Counseling at Concordia University Wisconsin. I was given the opportunity to complete my practicum hours starting in September 2012. This has been a wonderful experience for me. I've learned so much from the other therapists here, and will treasure my time here always. In addition to individual therapy, I've had the chance to co-facilitate an adolescent girls' support group for survivors of sexual assault, and it has been AMAZING! I think the support group will be the most memorable experience of this journey. I love the amount of support for the program that the community provides from the volunteer advocates, to law enforcement, to those who donate funds that allow the program to continue on.

I am so grateful that Terri, Vicki, Sam, Katy, and Cassie allowed me to join their team, and I hope they know just how much I appreciate them! My time here will end around April 30, so this article is a brief "HELLO" and "FAREWELL" to all!

—Twyla



## Farewell Cassie!

As some of you may know I made the decision to go back to school to get my Masters in Social Work this past Fall. My desire to focus on my education has led me to the decision to leave my position at Sexual Assault Services (SAS) of Lutheran Social Services. This was not an easy decision to make but was what I needed to do for this period in my life. I want to personally thank SAS staff and all of the community members that were a help to me during my time at SAS. I will miss working in the Racine community; there are so many great people working to end all forms of violence. Thank you all again.

—Cassie

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data would be needed than is currently readily available. Data regarding arrests as well as prosecution and conviction rates for sexual assault crimes would greatly enhance the ability to gauge the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. By examining trends in the criminal justice system, we will be able to derive an indication of the ability of our state to hold perpetrators of sexual assault accountable. This data may also highlight areas where further work is needed in improving the system's response to sexual assault. This data may also serve an important function in the prevention of sexual assault by providing the context in which we examine the impact of this public health problem on our state. By providing a greater understanding of the reality of sexual assault and its impacts, we begin the process of changing the community norms and attitudes that allow sexual assault to be perpetrated. WCASA's aim is to work with the relevant state agencies and authorities to establish a reliable and consistent data reporting system concerning sexual assault crimes that can regularly inform policymakers and the public alike.

It was a wonderful day to talk with our state representatives to discuss these important issues related to sexual assault victims/survivors. WCASA and WCADV hold a Legislative Advocacy day every two years in late March. Please contact Vicki Biehn at [vbiehn@lsswis.org](mailto:vbiehn@lsswis.org) or 262-763-6226 ext. 109 if this is something that you are interested in participating in in the future.

If you would like to be added to the WCASA action alert email list, please contact Vicki Biehn at [vbiehn@lsswis.org](mailto:vbiehn@lsswis.org) or Ian Henderson at [ianh@wcasa.org](mailto:ianh@wcasa.org). This is basically an email alert list that sends out information occasionally about upcoming legislative issues and asks you to contact your state or federal representative and then ask them to either support or not support an upcoming bill. Please use this link to find out who your representative is <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/Pages/waml.aspx>.

Below is some information about webinars on the legislative process that you can watch and listen to via a YouTube link that can be found on WCASA's website here: <http://www.wcasa.org/pages/Policy-State-Webinars.php>. These webinars will help us to understand the legislative process. Please feel free to contact me at [vbiehn@lsswis.org](mailto:vbiehn@lsswis.org) or 262-763-6226 ext. 109 if you have any questions or concerns. Thanks for your time!

#### Session #1:

***"I'm Just a Bill: A primer on the legislative process and basic legislative advocacy."***

An overview of how bills become laws in Wisconsin. A guide to the many stages in the process, the importance of timing, and how local groups can best influence the process.

#### Session #2

***"Committees, Amendments, Vetoes, etc.: How to track what's happening with legislation."***

A review of how to easily track legislation and links to resources for more detailed information on legislative developments.

#### Session #3:

***"Don't be Baffled by the Budget: The biennial budget process."***

An overview of opportunities for advocacy during the two-year state budget cycle.

—Vicki





# Helping Hands

By Katy Adler

A well-known fact among those of us who work with sexual assault survivors is that most of them (over half – 54%) do not report the crime to the police. Additionally, of those sexual assaults that are reported to the police, an even smaller number actually go through the court system. One study of a number of metropolitan and rural communities found that, on average, 86% of reported sexual assaults never went further than the police, and the majority of those were never forwarded for prosecution.

These numbers are frustrating for anyone who hears them, which is why insight into case attrition is valuable. Rebecca Campbell has done research into case attrition and what might be happening with these cases that are not moving forward in the criminal justice system. She found a number of themes: law enforcement often said that they did not believe victims because their stories were disjointed and weren't making sense, which they took as indications that they were lying, and victims often felt that the police didn't believe their stories, which left them feeling revictimized, discouraged, and reluctant to seek help.

Understanding how trauma affects memory and recall can help us to understand why victims' stories may not make sense, which in turn could help with increasing the number of cases that move forward in the criminal justice system. It also may help us as a community to be empathetic toward victims, and decrease the amount of victim blaming that they encounter.

## *What happens when the brain is faced with a sexual assault?* **"Hormonal soup"**

Trauma, such as sexual assault, causes the brain to release various chemicals. A number of different areas of the brain play a part in this process. First, the hypothalamus sends a message to the pituitary gland that the body is in trauma. The pituitary gland then tells the adrenals to release hormones to help the body respond to the trauma. Four different chemicals are released:

- Catecholamines (adrenaline): help with the fight or flight response
- Cortisol: affects the amount of energy the body has
- Opiates: the body's natural morphine, helps the body deal with pain
- Oxytocin: helps the body manage pain, increase positive feelings

While these chemicals increase the body's ability to manage trauma in the moment, they may have lasting effects that impair a victim's ability to recall the trauma, at least initially. In addition, this flood of hormones may cause victims to act in atypical ways. For example, due to the opiates and oxytocin in her system, a victim may have a flat affect, expressing little or no emotion. Additionally, the catecholamines reduce victims' ability for rational thought, their ability to do the

"if this then that" type of thinking. Victims may be unable to think of options or strategies of what to do during the sexual assault, which often leads to later questions of "why didn't you... (flee, fight back, call for help, etc.)?" and can lead to the victim telling herself what she "should have" done and blaming herself.

## **Tonic Immobility**

The hormones released during trauma also have another effect; some victims, instead of experiencing the fight or flight response, freeze. This is called tonic immobility or "rape-induced paralysis." This is an uncontrollable response where the victim cannot move; she experiences muscular paralysis. Victims who experience this may blame themselves for not being able to fight back against their abuser. They could also experience victim blaming from others, who may say that she must have consented or wanted it because she didn't fight back or try to get away.

## *Effects of the "hormonal soup" on memory*

### **Formation and Recall of Memories**

This flood of chemicals, while helpful in preparing the body to respond to trauma, impair the brain's ability to form and store memories in a linear, orderly fashion. The hippocampus is the structure in the brain that is responsible for processing information into memories. It takes everything we see, hear, feel, smell, taste and touch, and organizes it to create memories. When we are faced with trauma, a more primitive structure, the amygdala, also works to process memories. The amygdala and hippocampus work together to organize the information coming in. These two structures are very sensitive to fluctuations in hormones. What this means for a sexual assault victim is that when these hormones and chemicals flood their body, they (the chemicals) are impairing the hippocampus and amygdala while at the same time helping the victim survive. Instead of taking in information and storing it in an organized fashion, bits of information are stored in many different places. This makes recall slow and difficult. The storage and recall of memories is accurate, and what a sexual assault victim remembers is accurate, but it just may come out slowly, in a fragmented, piecemeal fashion.

## *What can we do with this information?*

With this knowledge, we can validate victims' experiences. We can give them information on why they may not have been able to fight back, why they weren't able to think rationally, or why they aren't able to recall the assault in an organized way. It also helps us understand victims' behavior. We are less likely to blame a victim or think that a victim is lying when we have this knowledge.

We can also use this knowledge to change the way we talk with victims following an assault. Interviewers, such as law enforcement investigators or sexual assault nurse examiners, can anticipate the difficulties victims may have when recalling the assault, and can adjust their techniques to allow more time and patience for getting the victim's story.

—Katy

Source: *Research for the Real World: The Neurobiology of Sexual Assault, Presentation by Rebecca Campbell for the National Institute of Justice, December 2012.*





# Family Advocate

By Samantha Sustachek

Happy Spring everyone! This time of year is always a busy one for us at Sexual Assault Services, as April brings Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). As I have mentioned in past years, April is also Child Abuse Prevention Month. Year after year, the Racine County Child Advocacy Center becomes busier, providing interviews and medical exams for Racine County children who have experienced some form of abuse. In light of this and in light of SAAM and Child Abuse Prevention Month, I would like to use this column to offer some suggestions for preventing child abuse – both physical and sexual.

Preventing child abuse is a complicated prospect, but Blue Ribbons for Kids ([www.blueribbonsonline.org](http://www.blueribbonsonline.org)) offers a few simple suggestions to adults to help them intervene in situations that could escalate into physical abuse. Oftentimes, these situations arise out of stress, lack of effective disciplinary tactics, or parental expectations that go beyond a child's developmental level. If you are out in public and see an interaction between a parent and child that makes you uncomfortable, speak up. There are several things you can try.

- Take the attention off the child by starting a conversation with the adult. You could try empathizing with the parent about how difficult it can be to deal with the behavior of children or you could acknowledge the parent's frustration and offer to help.
- Distract a misbehaving child by starting a conversation with him/her. You could ask about a favorite toy the child might be carrying or about something he/she is wearing.
- Find a way to compliment the parent or the child. You could comment to the parent that their child is cute and ask how old he/she is.
- Assist if the child is in danger. If you see a child left alone in a shopping cart, for example, stay with the child until the parent comes back.

These small distractions may be enough to diffuse the situation and give the parent and the child a moment to think about their behavior. No matter what you choose to do, keep the interaction positive. Negativity will only increase the stress and anger of the parent and could escalate the situation. Of course, this type of bystander intervention only plays a small part in preventing child abuse, but it is something that anyone can do.

Blue Ribbons for Kids also has some simple suggestions when it comes to preventing sexual abuse of children. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to:

- Pay attention and trust their instincts about other people who seem too interested in their children. Be cautious

about any adults who have access to their children unsupervised. Encourage their children to trust their intuition as well.

- Learn about age-appropriate sexual behavior. Teach their children appropriate boundaries when it comes to sexual behavior.
- Communicate openly with their children every day. Listen when their children have problems or concerns.
- Pay attention if their children's behavior toward an individual changes – something concerning may be going on. Also know that a child's behavior may not change towards an individual who is sexually abusing him/her, especially if the child knows and trusts that individual.
- Educate children on the difference between good and bad secrets.
- Talk to children about what to do if someone touches them in a way that does not feel right to them and makes them uncomfortable.
- Teach children that their bodies belong to them and that they have a right to say no to any kind of unwanted touch – even hugs and kisses from relatives. Resources like, *A Very Touching Book* by Jan Hindman can help parents to accomplish this.

Child abuse, especially child sexual abuse, thrives on secrecy. If bystanders speak up and take action when they notice concerning behaviors and if adults communicate openly with children about appropriate boundaries, we can break the secrecy surrounding abuse and help to keep kids safer.

—Sam



## SAS Program Statistics July—December 2012

Crisis Line Calls.....	70
Racine Hospital Visits.....	43
Burlington Hospital Visits.....	3
Legal Advocacy Sessions.....	44
New Counseling Clients.....	46
Counseling Sessions.....	454
Community Presentations.....	21
CAC Appointments.....	112



Sexual Assault Services  
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## Contact Us!

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262-619-1634

SAS Burlington Office  
480 S. Pine St.  
Burlington, WI 53105  
262-763-6226 Ext. 109

24 Hour Crisis Line: 262-637-SAFE (7233)

Website: <http://www.sasoflss.org>

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## Stay Connected!



Join our News and Events email update list! Would you like to receive information on upcoming SAS events and volunteer opportunities? Email Samantha Sustachek at [ssustachek@lsswis.org](mailto:ssustachek@lsswis.org) with "SAS news and events" in the subject line and she will include you in all SAS news and events related emails.

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***Sexual Assault Services seeks to create a safe and compassionate environment to help promote the healing of sexual assault survivors and their support people.***

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